DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 676 EC 305 375

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TITLE The Present Situation and the Future Development of Special Education in Bulgaria.
PUB DATE Jul 96
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual World Congress of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities (10th, Helsinki, Finland, July 8-13, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Policy; Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; *Mental Retardation; Resistance to Change; *Special Education; Special Schools; *Student Placement; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the present situation of special education in Bulgaria and discusses the results of a study of attitudes toward the mainstreaming of students with intellectual disabilities. The first part of the paper discusses the classification of children with intellectual disabilities into "educable" and "non-educable" categories and the historical segregation of "educable" children with intellectual disabilities into special schools. The educational requirements of the special education policy in Bulgaria are also reviewed. The second part of the paper reveals the results of a questionnaire on student integration distributed to administrators, university teachers, teachers in regular schools, and teachers in special schools (n=103). Results indicate that the concept of integration is not very popular among teachers in regular schools and special schools, that different groups perceive integration differently, and that a majority of teachers do not recognize the rights of children with intellectual disabilities to be educated in regular schools. A majority of teachers were also found to believe that the resources and conditions in regular schools were not appropriate for the needs of children with intellectual disabilities. Recommendations are made for introducing more integrated environments. The statistical results of the questionnaire are attached. (CR)

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ED 405 676

THE PRESENT SITUATION AND THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN BULGARIA

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This paper is divided in two main parts: the first deals with the present situation of special education (SE) for intellectually disabled people, and the second concerns the matters of integrated education and possibilities for its development discussed from different points of view. **The first** part is briefly described according to several main points as they are declared in "Review of the Present Situation in Special Needs Education" edited by UNESCO in 1988 and 1995. **The second** is based on our own investigation of the attitude towards the mainstreaming of pupils with intellectual disability (ID). A questionnaire was distributed to different specialists in educational integration-- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology officers, teacher-trainers, mainstream teachers, and teachers in special schools.

There are now over 100, 000 people with ID in Bulgaria (Timchev, 1994). About 35, 000 of them are children and youth (3). There are 94 special schools, 5 nurseries and 10 special educational-vocational centers (institutions) for children and young people with mild ID (MID) only. Children and adolescents with more severe ID (moderate, severe and profound, according to the 1985 WHO classification) were and still are excluded from the public educational system. Thirty two social centers (homes) were developed especially for them. The situation is shown in Tables 1 and 2 (by Zl. Dobrev, 2).

According to traditional theories in Bulgarian "defectology", people with ID were and still are divided in two categories in accordance to their educational capabilities: "educable" and "non-educable". This concept is laid down in the sole common document of Ministry of Education (ME) and Ministry of Health (MH) from 1977 regulating the procedures of assessment and referral of children with special educational needs (SEN) into special schools (see 1). According to it, pupils with MID only have the right to go to a school specially designed for their needs-- a "support school". Thus, the document plays a doubly discriminative role. On the one hand, it discriminates against children with MID by restricting them to special schools; on the other, it discriminates against the rest with more severe ID by totally excluding them from the educational system.

The main goal of special educational policy as declared in "Review of the Present Situation in Special Needs Education" from 1995 on the part of Bulgaria is "to provide an appropriate education and vocational training to children and young people with SEN" (5). However, this appropriateness is viewed in terms of segregated provision for some children. Unfortunately, they are children with ID (CID).

According to the legislation in this field, the education provided in the"support school" is not comparable to mainstream education or to the education provided in other special schools. Curriculum and programs are created on the basis of two main principles: the reduction and adaptation of academic content. The students have no right to further education outside a special educational-vocational center. This peculiarity of legislation increases discrimination against people with ID by predicting their future development as uncompetitive members of society.

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The responsibility for special education is shared between ME, MSW and MH. MH is responsible for the identification of ID, while MSW has the main responsibility in particular for people with moderate, severe and profound ID. Administrative decisions are taken at a national level. ME has recently been charged with direct financial responsibility for special schools which might be determined as very rational in the situation of economic crisis, while the mainstream schools are financed by LEA.
Special educational provision for CID is shown at Table 3.

Table 3.

	Day special schools	Boarding special schools	Special classes in ordinary schools
Children with MID	x	x	x
Children with multiple disabilities (including ID)	-	x	-
Children with moderate, severe and profound ID	-	-	-

Besides the last form, there is not any other kind of integrated education for children with MID.
Parents participate in assessment procedures as information contributors and "have the right to choose between a special school and a regular school" (5). Inspite of this declaration, they cannot realize this right because of objective obstructions existing in regular schools. No special support is currently available for such pupils so they are not able to progress there but become outsiders and drop-outs very soon. Unfortunately, we have to recognize that parents' associations and "National society for support of people with ID" in particular are not very powerful at the present time.
Teachers specialize in a particular field of SE at the very beginning of their initial teacher training. As qualified teachers they can work either in special school or institution for social care-- day care centers, residential homes, etc.
In Bulgaria, integration has recently been recognized as the main issue facing special educational policy and provision for children with visual and hearing impairments. Children with speech and language difficulties have never been segregated. Regarding their right to be educated alongside their peers in ordinary school settings, those with ID have always the greatest discrimination.

The second part of this paper, as we mentioned above, is devoted to an investigation concerning nine important topics in the field of integration. A questionnaire was distributed to the representatives of various professions working in the sphere of education. Their number and percentage correlation are presented at Table 4.

Table 4.

Number of people inquired/ percent	Ministry of Education (ME)	University teacher-trainers (UTT)	Teachers in regular schools (TRS)	Teachers in special schools (TSS)
103 (100%)	12 (11.65%)	10 (9.7%)	37 (35.92%)	44 (42,72%)

Results:

They are given separate.

Discussion:

Topic 1. It is clear that the concept of integration is not very popular, although 40% answered positively. About 1/3 of TRS declared different comprehension of integration. Most of them do not give any answer. The results are not surprising, since there is a lack of information in media in Bulgaria. The role of specialists working in the field of special education at the ministry and university levels is very significant for popularization of the concept.
A permanent 6.79% of TSS refused to fill out the questionnaire. It is not important for the general analysis, but a matter of significance is the reaction against inquiry as a whole. The reason for this might be lack of interest, but we also suggest a resistance determined by the reaction of protest against changes in traditional pedagogical work. We suppose that the leading factor in their resistance is the fear of the unknown.

Topic 2. The personal comprehension of integration in its educational aspect differs in distinct groups. While representatives of ME perceive it as socialization mainly through mainstreaming, UTT point out mainstreaming with the level of ID to be taken into account. It is not a surprising conclusion in the situation of present institutionalization for people with more severe ID and a theoretical heritage of eastern "defectology" emphasising the deficits more than the abilities of people with disabilities. About 2/3 of TRS do not give any answer, while 1/3 give a specific interpretation in terms of teaching methods and approaches.
It is not strange, since TRS have always been away from SE. More than a half of TSS give appropriate interpretation, although it is quite narrow. It is because special classes exist now in educational provision where there are no special schools. So this sole form of any kind of IE is caused by objective difficulties more than by human factors.

Topic 3/4. There is a little discrepancy between positions expressed on both topics, particularly in the groups of teachers. While most people do not accept as rational the existing segregated system, 55% do not acknowledge the right of education in a less restrictive environment, i.e., RS. ME and UTT give appropriate answers tending towards higher responsibility and commitment to human rights. Their social and professional status and functions suggest closeness to up-to-date realities. Teachers in both RS and SS present contradictions. Teachers are those who are proposed to be most practically involved in implementation of IE, so their positions might be viewed as not very objective. The resistance against alternative education for CID can be interpreted in terms of inadequate financial provision as well as a lack of willingness to break the stable traditional framework of education. However, the reasons are not just subjective, since a lack of information about the real nature and strategies of IE exists. Regarding alternative types of education and schools, there appears suspicion about the effectiveness of IE for children with more severe ID. Most people are aware of the inferiority of the present provision for CID, but at the same time resist opportunities for change in the light of IE.
Topic 5. There are possibilities for more than one answer on the next three topics. The discrepancy mentioned above persists again between the 4th and 5th topic positions regarding the rights of CID, perhaps due to the insufficient number of people as well as to a lack of personal concept for the right as a real human issue. While 55% refuse the right of education in RS for CID, 1/3 view themselves as

providers of a spectrum of human rights. ME and UTT fully declare their commitment to either educational or whole provision of human rights for CID. It is naturally that TSS put the contribution to education of CID as their main priority, while TRS prefer mostly to be charitable. 5.82% of them declare thair ignorance of responsibility, which can be seen in Jonsson's "Inclusive Education" in which he cites the attitude toward disabled children of many teachers: "These are not our children. They belong to special education" (4). Unfortunately, this position still persists in people's mind.

Topic 6. In spite of insufficient understanding of IE, it is logical to emphasize the two main premises of IE in its organizational respect: resources and resource (or support) teacher. The role of subjective factors in teachers and parents has been nearly twice as low as estimated. It is interesting to follow the range of answers in every group. Resources and awareness of TRS are placed at the highest from ME, since UTT consider each premise as equally important. That is very true in regards to recognizing the whole range of subjective and objective difficulties accompanying the process of IE's practical implementation. The most significant condition for TRS is resources, since these teachers are those who experience hardest the lack of funds, teaching and learning materials, personnel, etc. Second, the resource teacher is shown as necessary person, which reveals declining all responsibility for IE. Obviously, TRS have no perception of their contribution to IE. TSS point out their own role as support teachers, since they are nevertheless those who regard theirs the main educational responsibility for CID.

Topic 7. First, IE is considered to be an initiative of educational institutions and teachers in particular. The position of TSS is surprising because they put the IE in their own hands in spite of definite resistance they are still holding on. TRS prefer to give the initiative for the most part to legislative bodies. As participants in and contributors to educational acts, representatives of ME estimate the legislative bodies' role as irreplaceable, while UTT do not prioritize either one of the possibilities, since IE has to be a common act of society. It is well known that IE can initiate as a community act as well as a legislative one. But the first model requires high social commitment and awareness.

Topic 8. The resources in RS are viewed as definitely unsuitable from 50%. About 40% think they could be adapted to the needs of CID. ME and UTT demonstrate greater flexibility, relying again on adjustment of resources which we also consider as a real opportunity at present. But both TRS and TSS are unanimous on the inappropriateness of the basis available in Bulgarian schools today-- lack of funds and spaces as we discussed above. A bias appears again in their position.

Topic 9. The answer to the last question reveals the real attitude toward IE. According to current world realities, ME and UTT entirely accept IE recognizing objective deficits in the present system. TRS and TSS declare a sincere negative attitude toward IE, although a small number accept it principally without personal involvement. The interpretation of the present situation seems to be simple-- shortage of information, bad comprehension of the issue, a little bit inertia, and last but not least, an inadequate sample. Nevertheless, regardless of the last note, we consider the present investigation as characteristic of the national point of view regarding IE for CID.

Conclusions

1. IE as a better alternative for CID has been considered as both unacceptable and unknown concept. Nevertheless, the role of ME and UTT who declared great awareness of the issues of IE should be regarded as essential in light of popularizing and clarifying the concept. The media may become a powerful means in the efforts of concerned people to make the realization of IE possible.

2. Understanding the rights of CID in the light of WNO Declaration (1971) as well as in regard to international initiatives such as "Education for All," has to become personal issue. In this respect, such activities as PHARE programs, and TEMPUS projects, etc., in the field of SE are good means for popularization and implementation of current initiatives. With the support of EU in the framework of a TEMPUS Scheme the first journal of Special Education in Bulgaria began to issue. More and more publications on the matters of IE appear in Bulgarian scientific literature.

3. Establishment of the resources needed for IE is a matter of vital importance, especially because of Bulgaria's highly disadvantaged socio-economic situation. The crisis keeps people away from the sore points of society. We should emphasize the co-operative role of the Government in financial provision for IE. The teaching profession takes one of the lowest positions in the budget, so the reaction against any innovation without appropriate financial provision is natural. At the same time, traditional pedagogical approaches should be very seriously revised in terms of rethinking the priorities and movement from academic knowledge itself toward practical and social competence. This revision will lead to better opportunities for CID to integrate in mainstream schools.

4. We estimate as essential the role of legislative bodies and ME in creating a nationally adequate conceptual framework for IE. Teachers cannot be very powerful fone if they declare hesitant positions toward IE.

5. It is obvious that a positive attitude and the readiness of ME and UTT must be taken into account in the process of regulating, planning, implementing IE.

The present situation is hardly to be defined as suitable for initiating IE for CID. School reform in terms of "inclusion" cannot initiate in the situation of institutionalization and segregation still existing in Bulgaria. In spite of this, some forms of integrated education such as special classes in ordinary schools must be stimulated, since this now is the most acceptable alternative for IE. The personal commitment of conscientious professionals is crucial in the implementation of the other forms and models. In spite of the current impediments, we hope we will succeed in the process of humanizing the Bulgarian society .

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RESULTS OF THE INQUIRY

Topic 1: Are you acquainted with the concept of integration?

Number (percentage)

	yes	no	another	no answer
ME	5 (4.85%)	6 (5.82)	2 (1.94%)	
UTT	5 (4.85%)	4 (3.88%)	1 (0.97%)	
TRS	6 (5.82%)	27 (26.21%)	3 (2.91%)	1 (0.97%)
TSS	26 (25.24%)	9 (8.73%)	2 (1.94%)	7 (6.79%)
general	42 (40.77%)	48 (44.66%)	8 (7.76%)	7 (7.76%)

Topic 2: Would you describe briefly your own comprehension of educational integration?

Type of answers:
ME: Socialisation through mainstreaming and creation of opportunities for normal life (the role of special educator is essential)- 11.65%
UTT: Education of children with SEN alongside their peers in regular schools (degree of ID must be taken into account)- 9.7%
TRS: Education of children with SEN in regular schools- 4.85%
Integration as pedagogical term meaning combination of subjects, teaching approaches, methods, etc.- 11.64%
no answer- 19.41%
TSS: Education of groups of children with SEN in regular classes- 25.24% Special class in RS- 6.79% no answer- 10.68%

Topic 3: Do you accept as the most appropriate and rational the existing system of special schools and social institutions for children with ID?

Number (percentage)

	yes	no	another	no answer
ME	-	11 (10.67%)	1 (0.97%)	
UTT	1 (0.97%)	6 (5.82%)	3 (2.91%)	
TRS	8 (7.76%)	26 (25.24%)	3 (2.91%)	
TSS	30 (29.12%)	6 (5.82%)		7 (6.79%)
general	39 (37.86%)	49 (47.57%)	7 (6.79%)	7 (6.79%)

Topic 4: Do you acknowledge the right of children with ID for education in regular schools?

Number (percentage)

	yes	no	another	no answer
ME	7 (6.79%)	3 (2.91%)	2 (1.94%)	
UTT	7 (6.79%)	1 (0.97%)	1 (0.97%)	1 (0.97%)
TRS	3 (2.91%)	25 (24.27%)	9 (8.73%)	
TSS	3 (2.91%)	28 (27.18%)	5 (4.85%)	8 (7.76%)
general	20 (19.41%)	57 (55.33%)	17 (16.5%)	9 (8.73%)

Topic 5: How do you consider your own role among the efforts of society to improve the status of children with ID?

Range of answers

	ME	UTT	TRS	TSS	general
# charity	2 (1.94%)	4(3.88%)	13(12.62%)	4(3.88%)	23(22.33%)
# contribution to the education of CID	6(5.82%)	9(8.73%)	7(6.79%)	18(17.47%)	40(38.83%)
# provision of the whole range of human rights for them	5(4.85%)	5(4.85%)	11(10.67%)	11(10.67%)	32(31.06%)
# nothing to do with me			6(5.82%)	8(7.76%)	14(13.59%)
# another			2(1.94%)		2(1.94%)
# no answer				8(7.76%)	8(7.76%)

Topic 6: What are the premises needed to provide integrated education in regular schools?

Range of answers

	ME	UTT	TRS	TSS	general
# availability of resources	5(4.85%)	4(3.88%)	21(20.38%)	14(13.59%)	44(42.72%)
# availability of willing and awareness on the part of regular teachers	6(5.82%)	7(6.79%)	6(5.82%)	8(7.76%)	27(26.21%)
# availability of special (resource) teacher responsible for the children with ID	2(1.94%)	8(7.76%)	2(11.64%)	19(18.44%)	41(39.8%)
# availability of awareness on the part of other children parents	3(2.91%)	5(4.85%)	6(5.82%)	7(6.79%)	21(20.38%)
# education of this kind is impossible	2(1.94%)		3(2.91%)	11(10.68%)	16(15.53%)
# another			1(0.97%)		
# no answer				7(6.79%)	7(6.79%)

Topic 7: Whose should be the main responsibility for initiating integrated education?

Range of answers

	ME	UTT	TRS	TSS	general
# legislative bodies'	10(9.7%)	5(4.85%)	19(18.44%)	5(4.85%)	39(37.86%)
# educational institutions and					

teachers' in particular	4(3.88%)	7(6.79%)	12(11.64%)	25(24.27%)	48(46.6%)
# parents' and non-governmental associations	1(0.97%)	5(4.85%)	7(6.79%)	7(6.79%)	20(19.41%)
# another		1(0.97%)		1(0.97%)	2(1.94%)
# no answer			1(0.97%)	9(8.73%)	10(9.7%)

Topic 8: Do you consider as appropriate for the needs of CID the resources and conditions in regular schools?

Range of answers

	ME	UTT	TRS	TSS	general
# no, definitely	2(1.94%)		29(28.15%)	20(41.47%)	51(49.51%)
# no, but can be adjusted to be used	9(8.73%)	10(9.7%)	8(7.76%)	14(13.59%)	41(39.8%)
# yes, they are appropriate				3(2.91%)	3(2.91%)
# another		1(0.97%)			1(0.97%)
# no answer				7(6.79%)	7(6.79%)

Topic 9: Your personal opinion "towards to" or "away from" integrated education?

Range of answers

	ME	UTT	TRS	TSS	general
# yes, I accept this education	9(8.73%)	9(8.73%)	7(6.79%)	3(2.91%)	28(27.18%)
# yes, I accept it principally but prefer to be not personally involved	2(1.94%)		9(8.73%)	6(5.82%)	17(16.5%)
# no, I don't accept this education	1(0.97%)	1(0.97%)	19(18.44%)	27(26.21%)	48(46.6%)
# another			2(1.94%)	1(0.97%)	3(2.91%)
# no answer				7(6.79%)	7(6.79%)

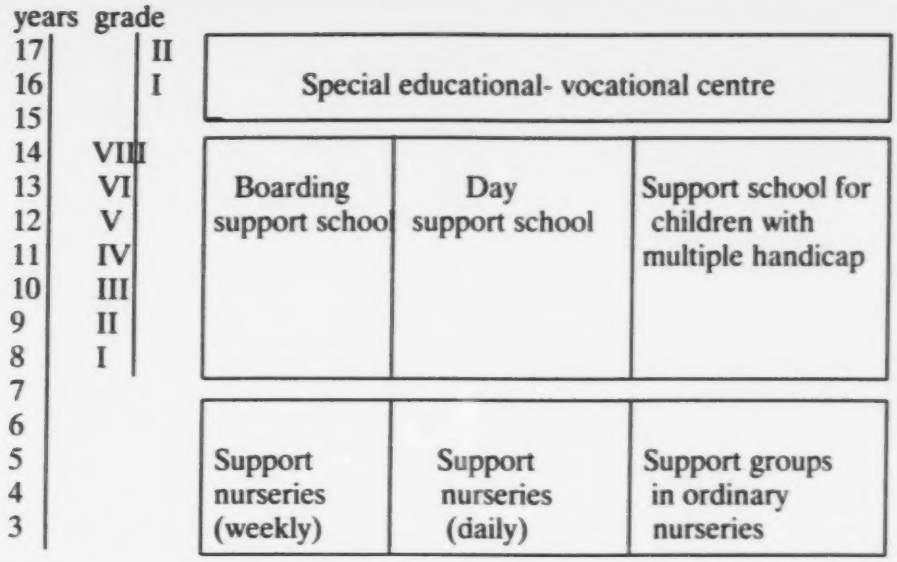

Table 1. Structure of educational system for CID

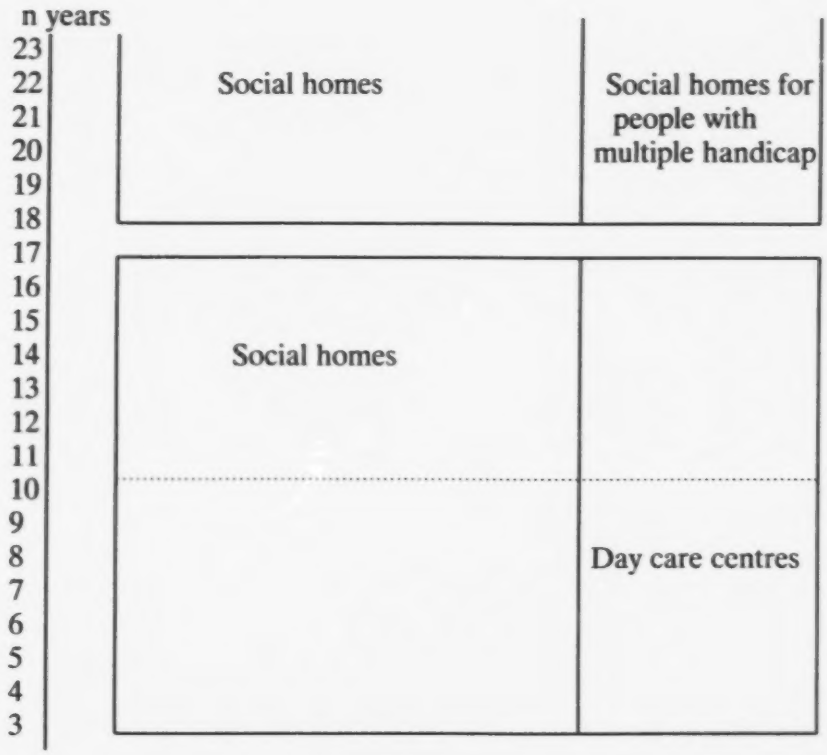

Table 2. Structure of social institutions for people with moderate, severe and profound ID